

Realism in Ibsen's Plays – A Critical Insight on Women in His Plays

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Abstract

The following study proposes to investigate into the disorder of Ibsen's society and the current problems triggered by the steadily declining moral values of his society. The study in the meanwhile also proposes to examine the society's relationship with Ibsen's characters of his dramas. The major plays which are going to be examined are actually from the series of his seven plays since these dramas depict his society in its true colours. The plays to be tangentially studied from the series are: Pillars of Society, A Doll's House, Ghosts, An Enemy of the People, The Wild Duck, and The Lady from the Sea.

Introduction:

It was Pillars of Society, his first major problem play with which Ibsen addressed the society. He brought to light the façade of morality and respectability in this play. What the play does here is that it alerts the audiences to what was on the surface and what lay behind in the form of self-centred motives and dishonesty of the people. This play basically is an attempt by Ibsen to unveil the pretentious social setting. It is an impeachment against the bogus social order structure that was dangerously resting on the erroneous pillars which were outwardly nicely ornamented but shallow within.

Karsten Bernick, a very prosperous ship owner and the major supporter of his town is depicted as the first wrong pillar of Ibsen's society, is. He is married to a woman whom he never loves. Marriage for him is only for the accomplishment of his desires. He reaches the lofty levels of his career through dishonesty and falsehoods. Bernick is held in the bedroom of an actress bedroom despite being engaged to some other woman. He has a close friend called Johan, whom he deprives of his moral uprightness by making him to take the responsibility and relocate. But Johan threatens to disclose the truth when he comes back from America. Angered by this, Bernick sends him in an awful ship. But shockingly it's revealed the same rotten ship is carrying his own son too. He realizes his misconduct and but is left scot-free. Bernick also deceives another woman Lona Hessel. She is the third woman whom he pretended to love but never marred since he had the desire to marry her stepsister. The only reason here is that she would bring him money and later better position because of the same.

Characters in Contemplation:

The major trait of Ibsen's plays was his interrogative approach for his audiences who would be asked to find suitable replies themselves. This play puts up a major question as to who can be the pillars of a society. The answer is the pillars of any society are honesty, truth, sacrifice and. Bernick lacked all these attributes but remained a pillar of the society. Ibsen's characterization exposes reality through a deeply laid plot and a mocking approach which will force his audiences to think and contemplate what is moral and what is amoral.

A Doll's House was a major setback to Ibsen's society. This play is about the life of a couple called Helmer and Nora who apparently are the happiest couple. Nora, Helmer's wife is more than content about her life in marriage with him. She believes in him more than anyone else. They have been married for eight years. All this time she has kept a major secret from Helmer. It is a loan she would have secretly borrowed from one Krogstad a colleague in the same bank of Helmer. In addition, she would also have forged the signature of her father. She had borrowed the loan only to facilitate Helmer's recuperation. But she had not intimated him about it. Things, nevertheless, are quite well. But the problem surfaces when Nora's childhood friend Mrs.Linde is hired to substitute Krogstad in the same bank. Angered by the whole episode Krogstad attempts to blackmail Nora. His demand is that that she has to make her husband not dismiss him from the official services. Otherwise, he would expose to the world about the apparent loan and more importantly the forgery.

Nora assumes that Helmer, who had so much for her would surely be her redeemer. She also believes that he would defend her from the prevailing danger. Besides, she also assumes that he would never let her take the entire blame on learning about the entire episode. Nevertheless, she attempts to stop Helmer from seeing the letters in the letter box since Krogstad's letter was also there in it. In the meantime, her friend, Mrs.Linde attempts to convince Krogstad to remove his letter. But at the same time she advises Nora to simply confess the truth. The general anticipation would be that Helmer would surely appreciate Nora and excuse her. On the contrary, Nora's expectation falls flat as Helmer reproaches her severely. He considers it to be a crime. Here Ibsen shows him as a man obsessed with his reputation. It is also decided that Nora is barred from her wifely and motherly duties. This disclosure of Helmer's hidden nature leaves Nora shocked. She instantly decides to liberate herself from the marital shackles.

Questioning the Human Institutions

The play on the whole reflects on the triviality of the modern institution called marriage. He has attempted to disclose the societal nuances through solid characterization by laying emphasis on trust, veracity, uprightness, affection and sincere duties have lost importance in the face of untruth, counterfeit, suspicion and money-oriented love. The time was such that the social standing of an individual is higher than anything else. This drama hence was the disclosure of the disgraceful and unprincipled facts of his society.

The next play in this fantastic series was an exceptional play called Ghosts. On the outset it seemed like a play on sexual disease and what its inferences could be in his society. But at the other extreme the whole crux of the play is about the ethical degeneration. Mrs.Alving had married Captain Alving just to make her own life more despicable and wretched. He was basically a mentally and physically wicked wreck who only made his wife's life irreparably degraded. However, the wife who was very dutiful only sheltered his true face. The play begins with Engstrand trying to persuade his daughter Regina to go with him and earn some substantial money by way of a lucrative marriage. But Regina happens to be a servant with the Manders house. She is also the illicit daughter of a servant of Pastor Manders. Mrs.Alving discovers this and tries to quietly handle the condition by getting Regina's mother married to Engstrand. She also gives him a hefty amount for the favour. Despite all this we are witness to Mrs.Alving inaugurating an orphanage to honour Captain Alving. This could be even

to cover up his hideous character. Summarily, the play concludes on a very depressing note.

An Enemy of the People, the next play by Ibsen was his response to the scalding criticism he had received for Ghosts. The actual Victorian belief that was instituted in people was that the community was to be treated as an honourable institution that all could trust. Ibsen, with this play, changed this prevailing notion.

The whole play happens in a town where a huge bathing area has been built. This is supposed to be a very essential source of economy for the town. The hero Dr. Stockmann is depicted as a man of high principles. He discovers that the baths have an unclean drainage system. Dr. Stockmann guarantees the people that the issue can be easily fixed by substituting the entire water system. He attempts to also alert the people regarding the same. He receives maximum support from Aslaksen and Hovstad. Initially they assure him unconditional support. Dr. Stockmann is hugely moved by their gesture. The twist is such that they change their stand soon after Dr. Stockmann's brother who is also the Mayor arrives on the scene. He is very upset about Dr. Stockmann's underground investigation of the baths and the quality of its water. He attempts to make Dr. Stockmann to keep his report unpublished. The mayor's contention is that it could surely cause heavy financial ruination to the town's tourism. Dr. Stockmann's expectations about his brother's support are contradicted flatly. The mayor's politicking becomes successful in getting the whole tide to his side. He convinces Aslaksen and Hovstad about the dangerous consequences of the discovery. Even the doctor's wife attempts to influence him regarding the disclosure of his discovery. But the adamant Dr. Stockmann never agrees. Ultimately Dr. Stockmann finds himself without anyone supporting him. Dr. Stockmann corroborates Ibsen's condemnation of the masses. An Enemy of the People talks also about the irrational leanings of the crowds. The focus of the play is also on their support for insincere and unethical political.

The Wild Duck by Ibsen was another play in which the protagonist Hialmar lives with wife Gina and his daughter Hedvig. His father Ekdal is also with them in the apartment which is also their studio in which the couple work. They have a separate place meant for wild animals and rabbits. Old Ekdal was a lieutenant who would have served a jail term for financial wrongdoings which actually were committed by Werle. Gina has had a history of being Werle's paramour in her earlier years and now his housekeeper. It is Werle who arranges Gina and Hialmar's marriage. He also offers them financial help in starting their studio. At the beginning of the play, Werle's son Gregers has just come back because of which his father Werle has thrown a dinner party. Gregers is actually not all that happy with the conduct of his father. Hence he chooses not to live with his father. He attempts to reveal to Ekdal regarding the fraudulent marriage. This creates numerous doubts in Ekdal's mind. The actual purpose of Gregers is to somehow ensure that his friend's marriage becomes blissful. But Hedvig is intensely disturbed by this tumultuous change regarding the perspective of his family.

The last of the celebrated series was The Lady from the Sea. This drama was Ibsen's attempt to focus on the evils that haunt the marital lives of people. Ellida is the principal character. She is married to Dr. Wangel. He is too old for her and already has two daughters from the first marriage. Ellida's relationship with her

husband and also with the family appears to be strained. She is constantly preoccupied with the recollections of one sailor who had proposed to marry her. His great captivating powers were too much for her to forget the man. They had interconnected their rings inside a one key ring and had thrown it into the sea. She feels sickened and tormented in remaining in a relationship with her husband who had taken her as a wife when the prospects of marriage with sailor did not work as he did not return.

Dr.Wangel is quite worried on the other hand about her failing health and requests Arnholm to treat her misery. One fine day the sailor suddenly resurfaces and forces Ellida to join him. Dr.Wangel wants Ellida for sure but he chooses not to persuade her to stay in marriage with him. He doesn't want her to agonize herself mentally. He leaves it to her make the choice. She nearly decides to go with sailor. But her husband's decision to let her make the decision makes her stay in marriage as a loyal wife. But what Ibsen propagates here is that Ellida emerges as a completely independent woman who can make her decisions.

Conclusion:

The six plays selected out of the series of seven plays of this celebrated series have been the most fruitful plays of Ibsen's tumultuous career as a playwright. Ibsen's constant emphasis on only the social problems earned him a distinctive place in the literary circles. Ibsen's genius as a playwright has invariably been the thematic demonstration of social problems taken straight from real life. He has been remarkable in dealing with only such problems as are familiar to men and women in their real lives of. Contrary to this most literary products which came before Ibsen were largely either didactic or entertaining. Ibsen's new literary creation to his audiences was a major leap from the established genres. This realistic form of writing made it mandatory for the audiences to contemplate over what he had presented in his plays. He always promulgated the most essential values and universal themes. There was always maximum emphasis for right to expression, suppression of women, the social institution called marriage, mishandling of children, business integrities, insincerity, ethical duplicity, deceitful morality, religion have been some of his most common issues in his plays. Commonly acclaimed as a provincial dramatist Ibsen was habitually commanded by the social conscience. This pushed him into open disagreement within his own homeland and was also subjected to public indignation against his themes.

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